

Get Ready for Flu

King County

A Planning Guide from Public Health — Seattle & King County

The Specter of "Swine Flu": What's real and what's hype?

By David Fleming, MD, Director and Health Officer, Public Health – Seattle & King County

n the spring of 2009, the "swine flu" was all over the news. But with all the media attention, it's hard to separate the hype from the real information. Is H1N1 flu, or "swine flu," really that serious?

Many people in the United States and around the world have been infected with swine flu. At the time of this writing in June 2009, almost all cases of influenza in the nation have been similar to the regular seasonal flu that we see every year.

But scientists and health experts are still concerned. We are still learning more about the origins of the virus and how it behaves.

Typically, flu viruses become less common here as our weather warms. Past experience with other flu viruses suggests that the H1N1 flu virus may move to the Southern Hemisphere during our summer months and return to our area in the fall.

There is a possibility that the virus will mutate further and develop into a more deadly virus.

While we must plan for such a situation, at this point it is just speculation.

We do know that this is a new influenza virus, so few people will have any natural immunity to it from previous flu outbreaks.

The world has seen very severe types of the flu virus before — a virus that has the ability to spread from person to person quickly, and cause many deaths. In the last century, there were large, serious outbreaks in 1918, 1957, and 1968.

The world is very different now than it was in the early 1900s, or even four decades ago. We have medicines to treat the flu illness. And we have a public health system that has planned for the possibility of a severe outbreak. That public health system monitors illness in our community to watch out for any changes in normal disease patterns.

STRIKES

Despite these improvements, health experts and local leaders are still taking precautions. We have coordinated with area hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, and developed plans for distributing medical resources in the community. We have worked with school districts to close schools when we thought it was a necessary precaution. We also have distributed educational materials to help people learn how to protect themselves and their families.

The flu virus is unpredictable in many ways. There are some things that are certain though: Public Health and County officials will be continually monitoring the situation and keeping the public informed. Individuals and families can also prepare at home so that they are ready to take care of themselves and their loved ones if the worst should happen.

Please read through this guide to learn what you can do to prepare — and what Public Health is doing to prepare for a flu outbreak.



learn more

What Is a Pandemic?

t's hard to tell what a pandemic is. The term sounds scary, but actually describes a very specific situation. Pandemic flu is an outbreak of flu that spans several regions of the world. It is caused by a new flu virus that is unlike any other previous virus, so people will not have any immunity to it. A pandemic flu can pass readily from person to person, creating widespread illness.

Just because a disease qualifies for pandemic status, however, doesn't mean that the illness will cause widespread deaths. In the past, there have been both mild and severe pandemics. The 1918 flu pandemic was a severe pandemic. About 675,000 people in the United States died from the disease, and 50 million people total died around the world. The pandemic that started in 1968, however, was milder. About 34,000 people died in the United States and 700,000 people died globally. That's still a large number of people, and no flu is ever trivial. But the severity of the disease, and the impact to the functioning of society in 1968, were very different from the 1918 flu.

At the time of this writing in June 2009, the H1N1 flu ("swine flu") pandemic has not been severe. But if it continues to spread, and as it continues to circulate through human populations, the H1N1 virus could undergo changes. There's also the possibility that a different flu virus, such as the H5N1

avian virus (commonly known as "bird flu"), will develop the ability to infect large numbers of the human population. And should the H5N1 avian virus turn into a pandemic, we'd likely be facing something much more serious than what we've seen from the current outbreak. That's why it's good to know what to expect should we ever face a more alarming scenario.

In a pandemic, everyday life will not be the same. At the outset of the H1N1 flu ("swine flu") outbreak, some schools around the country closed as a precautionary action to slow the spread of influenza. In a more severe pandemic, school closures could become widespread and longer-lasting, and public gatherings could be canceled. With so many people ill, caring for the ill, or staying home with their children, the U.S. workforce could face



Workers in downtown Seattle during the 1918 influenza pandemic. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, SOC306.

large reductions — and that would affect our ability to get goods and services. Everyone needs to be prepared to deal with these possibilities at home and in the workplace. Read the "Plan Now" section of this issue to learn what you can do.

Flu FAQ

Can you get H1N1 flu ("swine flu") from eating pork or being around pigs?

No, eating pork or being near pigs cannot give you H1N1 flu.

How does the flu spread?

Flu viruses are mostly spread from a sick person to others by coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.



plan now

Pandemic Flu Planning Checklist for Individuals and Families

AT HOME

Store water, food, and other essentials. Prepare to get by for at least a week on what you have at home (see box below).

Store medical and health supplies. Ask your health-care provider for a prescription for an extra supply of your regular drugs. Keep health supplies and nonprescription drugs on hand (see sidebox on next page).

Make household emergency plans.

- Decide who will take care of children if schools are closed.
- Prepare for possible changes in healthcare. For example, medical advice and healthcare may

be more difficult to obtain during a severe pandemic. There may not be enough medical supplies, healthcare providers, and hospital beds for all persons who are ill.

- Difficult decisions about who receives medical care and how much treatment can be administered will be necessary. Talk about these possibilities with your family and loved ones.
- In a severe pandemic, you may be advised to stay away from others and from public places as much as possible. Plan to limit the number of trips you take to run errands.
- Think about how you would care for people in your family who have disabilities if support services are not available.

GREEN BEANS DRINK ADE ADE TOMATO SPAGHETTI SAUCESAUG SPAGHETTI SPA

AT WORK

part of your job.

Prepare to stay at home. Staying at home from work when you are sick is the most important thing you can do to protect others.

Examples of Nonperishable Food

- Canned meats
- Canned beans, fruits, vegetables, soups
- Protein or fruit bars
- Dry cereal or granola
- Dried fruit
- Peanut butter
- Nuts and trail mix
- Crackers
- Comfort food, including cookies, candy, instant coffee, tea bags
- Canned juices
- Bottled water
- Baby formula and baby food

Examples of Other Emergency Supplies

- · Pet food, cat litter
- Disposable diapers
- Feminine supplies
- Flashlight
- Portable radio
- Batteries
- Manual can opener
- Plastic garbage bags
- Tissues and toilet paper
- Entertainment games, crafts, books, movies, etc.
- Supplies for persons with special needs — the elderly or disabled
- Some extra cash

Every business, organization and agency should have a plan for making sure essential work can get done if large numbers of employees are absent over many months. You may be asked to perform duties that are not typically

Encourage planning.

Explore other ways to get your work done. Find ways to reduce personal contact, such as increased use of emails or phone conferences. Plan to work from home whenever possible.

(Continued on next page)

stay well

Pandemic Flu Planning Checklist for Individuals and Families (Continued from previous page)

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Talk with family, friends, and neighbors to make sure everyone is prepared. Be ready to help neighbors who are elderly or have special needs, if services they depend on are not available.

Know school policies.
Know policies about illness and being absent. Be prepared for school closures.

Volunteer with community groups. Assist with

planning for emergency response

to disasters and pandemic

influenza.

Examples of medical and health supplies

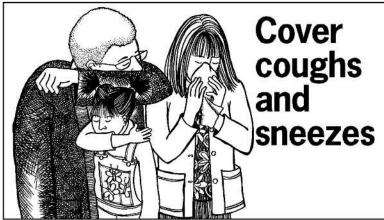
- Prescribed medicines and supplies, such as glucose meters and bloodpressure monitoring equipment
- Alcohol-based hand cleaner
- Medicines for fever and pain, such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen
- Diarrhea remedy, such as Pepto-Bismol® or Kaopectate®
 - (Note: not for use in young children)

- Throat lozenges
- Cough syrup containing dextromethorphan
- Thermometer(s)
- Vitamins
- Fluids with electrolytes, like Gatorade® and Pedialyte®
- Soap and water

www.kingcounty.gov/health/pandemicflu

Stop Germs, Stay Healthy!









stop infection

Preventing the Spread of Flu

ost patients with pandemic flu will be able to remain at home during the course of their illness and can be cared for by others in the household. This information is intended to help you care for ill persons in the home, both during a typical flu season and during a flu pandemic.

PREVENT THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS IN THE HOME

WHAT CAREGIVERS CAN DO

- Physically separate influenza patients from other people as much as possible.
- Designate one person in the household as the main caregiver for the ill person.
- Watch for influenza symptoms in other household members.

WHAT EVERYONE IN THE HOUSEHOLD CAN DO

 Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleanser after each contact with an influenza patient or with objects in the area where the patient is located.

- Don't touch your eyes, your nose, or your mouth without first washing your hands for 20 seconds. Wash hands before and after using the bathroom.
- Place tissues used by the ill patient in a bag and throw away with other household waste.
- Clean counters and other areas in the home regularly using everyday cleaning products.

PREVENT THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

- Stay at home if you are sick.
- If the ill person must leave home, he or she should wear a surgical mask, if available, and take the following steps:
 - Cover the mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, using tissues or the crook of the elbow instead of the hands.
 - Use tissues to contain mucous and watery discharge from the mouth and nose.
 - Dispose of tissues in the nearest waste bin after use or carry a small plastic bag for used tissues.

- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleanser after covering a cough or sneeze, wiping your nose, and handling contaminated objects.
- Only people who are essential for patient care or support should enter a home where someone is ill with pandemic flu unless they have already had the illness.

Know the symptoms of influenza, which may include:

- Sudden onset of illness
- Fever higher than 100.4° F (38° C)
- Chills
- Cough
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Feeling of weakness and/or exhaustion
- Diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain



how to care for someone with influenza

Rest, Hydrate, Watch

- **Rest is very important.**Keep the ill person as comfortable as possible.
- Keep the person hydrated.
 - Offer small amounts of fluid frequently, even if the ill person does not feel thirsty.
 - Watch for signs of dehydration. Someone who is dehydrated may have weakness or unresponsiveness, or decreased output of urine.
 - See the "Fluids and Nutrition section" below for information about what to do if the patient is vomiting.
- Watch for complications.
 Call a doctor right away if the ill person:
 - Has difficulty breathing or fast breathing.
 - Has a bluish color to the skin or lips.
 - Begins coughing up blood.
 - Complains of pain or pressure in the chest.
 - Shows signs of dehydration and cannot take enough fluids.
 - Appears confused or does not respond appropriately.
 - Has convulsions.
 - Gets worse after appearing to improve.
 - Is an infant younger than 2 months old with fever, poor feeding, urinating less than 3 times per day, or other signs of illness.



MEDICATIONS

- Use ibuprofen or acetaminophen or other measures for fever, sore throat, and general discomfort.
- Do not use aspirin in children or teenagers with influenza, because it can cause Reye's syndrome, a lifethreatening illness.

FLUIDS AND NUTRITION

 If the ill person is not eating solid foods, include fluids that contain sugars and salts, such as broth, sports drinks (diluted half and half with water), and sodas, but not diet drinks.

- If the patient is vomiting, do not give any fluid or food for at least 1 hour.

 Then offer a clear fluid in very small amounts. Let the stomach rest for an hour after each time the person vomits before giving more fluid.
- Babies who are breast-fed and vomiting can continue to nurse, but offer smaller amounts.



know what to expect

We're Preparing. Are You?

Keeping the community strong and healthy is a top priority in King County. Some of our numerous pandemic preparedness efforts include:

- Developing systems for maintaining critical King County services during a pandemic..
- Convening a coalition of health care organizations to coordinate and optimize health care resources during emergencies.
- Engaging the business community in developing plans to protect employees and continue business operations with a reduced workforce.
- Providing planning assistance to school districts, daycares, community-based organizations, and governments in all 39 King County cities.
- Working with the medical community to detect and track any suspected cases of pandemic flu.

- Purchasing a stockpile of antiviral medication for the most severely ill and developing distribution plans for any available vaccine.
- Educating the public about pandemic flu through the mass media, distribution of informational materials, and public presentations.

 Conducting simulated pandemic flu exercises and drills to test King County's readiness.

Much work remains to get ready for an emergency of this magnitude. Everyone who lives and works in King County can help out just by taking the preparedness steps

described in this issue.



Doc Talk

Prepare for Change

n a typical day, emergency rooms in King County are busy with a steady stream of illnesses and injuries. Now imagine what our ERs would look like during a severe influenza pandemic when hundreds of additional patients are added each day — and with a third of the hospital staff out with the flu. It's the kind of scenario that may face all hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices during a severe flu pandemic.

The strain on the healthcare system during a severe flu pandemic will be unlike any other disaster, so we all need to be prepared for possible changes. Even though healthcare facilities in King County are working to increase their ability to care for a surge in pandemic flu patients, it may be difficult to get medical care or talk to your healthcare provider. There may not be enough medical supplies, healthcare providers, and hospital beds for all persons who are ill. As a result, healthcare providers will need to make tough decisions about who receives medical care and how much treatment can be administered.

Vacant hospital beds may be

scarce, but most people who get a pandemic flu virus can be cared for at home and will recover (see page 6). During a pandemic, updated information and advice about home medical care will be available on the Public Health website and through a telephone hotline.

A severe pandemic will place tremendous stress on everyone, including healthcare providers. But in most cases, people with the flu can receive the care they need at home, and basic precautions and attention (such as those detailed on page 6) will really help.

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Things You Should Know About Pandemic Flu

- 1. Pandemic flu can be much more serious than seasonal flu. Some pandemics are similar to the regular flu season, but others can be more severe, widespread, and deadlier.
- 2. A pandemic flu will be global. Travel routes will make it easy for the virus to spread quickly across borders. Communities across the U.S. and around the world will be affected at the same time.
- 3. The single best thing you can do to avoid getting any flu virus is to wash your hands. Wash frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- 4. A vaccination will not be available at the outset of a pandemic. Once a pandemic flu virus is identified, it could take several months to develop and produce large quantities of vaccine.
- 5. Flu spreads person-toperson through coughs and sneezes of infected people. When people cough or sneeze, they spread germs through the air or onto surfaces that other people may touch.
- 6. A severe pandemic may cause widespread social and economic disruption. Government services, public utilities, stores, the



Flu germs spread when people cough and sneeze.

post office, and other businesses may be limited. Transportation services may be disrupted and schools may be closed (see page 2).

- 7. It may be difficult to work during a severe pandemic. Find out if you can work from home and ask your employer if they have a plan in place. Plan for a possible reduction in income if you are unable to work or if your workplace closes.
- 8. A pandemic could overwhelm the health care system. High numbers of ill people during a severe pandemic will put enormous pressure on our health care system. Prepare to follow care provider and public health officials about how to obtain medical advice and receive care (see page 7).
- 9. We will need to pull together as communities during a pandemic. We will need to check on our neighbors and help those

around us, especially if we experience major social and economic disruptions. This may be as simple as calling your neighbor from a "phone tree" list, or dropping off supplies on the doorstep of a homebound friend.

10. There are simple steps you can take to prepare for a flu pandemic. Learn how to protect your health, stock your home with supplies, and make household plans (see page 3).

For more information:

- Public Health Seattle & King County www.kingcounty.gov/health/ pandemicflu
- Washington State Department of Health www.doh.wa.gov/panflu
- Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.pandemicflu.gov



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www.kingcounty.gov/health/h1n1